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# Just Places: Creating a Space for Place in Environmental Justice

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## Just Places: Creating a Space for Place in Environmental Justice

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### Abstract.

This paper explores how discourses on sense of place and cultural heritage inform environmental justice conflicts. I argue that while economic distribution remains the overarching frame within environmental justice scholarship, cultural entitlement concerns are rarely discussed in the literature. I argue that environmental justice scholarship can draw upon place and cultural research to explore how cultural entitlement claims can be incorporated in environmental justice. I draw upon place literature to propose a three-dimensional typology of place. I call these three dimensions – *political place*, *cultural place*, and *moral place*. The proposed typology allows us to examine how discourses of place and culture are incorporated in narratives of environmental justice. Finally, I apply this typology to an interesting story of environmental and cultural injustice in a community known as Land Between the Rivers in western Kentucky in the United States.

### Keywords

Place, Environmental justice, Narratives, Displacement

Environmental justice movement has been embraced by communities around the world confronting unequal distribution of environmental goods and bads. The movement emerged in the early 1970s as a struggle against disproportionate distribution of environmental waste and its impact on the poor and communities of color. These conflicts are well-documented in academic and scholarly writings on environmental studies. Early research on environmental justice provided documentary evidence of the unequal outcomes of toxic releases, occupational exposure and waste facility siting (GAO 1983; UCC 1987; Bullard 1993; Berry 1977; Bath, Tanski & Villareal 1994; Comancho 1998; Hooks & Smith 2004; Lavelle & Coyle 1992). Further, environmental justice researchers have examined socio-historical processes to understand how these inequalities occurred (Szasz & Meuser 2000; Pellow 2004; Capek 1993).

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Additionally, scholars have also examined community activism in framing resistance movements to environmental inequities (Pulido 1996; Taylor 2000). Thus, environmental justice theory has made important strides in unpacking the ideas of inequity in the distribution of environmental goods and bads.

While distributive fairness of environmental resources remains the cornerstone of environmental justice, claims for cultural entitlements are largely sidelined within the discipline. Cultural entitlements refer to intangible associations such as identity, social history, and a sense of place that defines a community. These associations are not simply objects to be understood; rather they exist as social processes that become meaningful through a community's knowledge of the past. Loss of these cultural entitlements occurs in the event of forcible uprooting of communities who are affected by environmental disasters or subjected to economic developments. For example, the impact of Hurricane Katrina was magnified by the loss of a sense of place and not merely by the physical destruction of the city. Destruction of homes and subsequent evacuations of communities in New Orleans, sometimes permanently, transformed the places once inhabited by generations of families. Re-establishing this sense of place cannot be fueled by creating "cultures-on-demand" through economic stimulus, redistribution of resources, and tourism.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the loss of indigenous Amazonian tribal attachment to the Brazilian rainforest as a result of economic development or the loss of cultural identity of the nomadic snake charmers to rural development in India cannot be reduced to calls for economic redistribution. Instead, such losses, even when communities are well-compensated, are often irreparable and contribute to a loss of place, a way of living, and a cultural identity.

While the stories of cultural entitlements are immersed in movement narratives, these remain unaddressed within environmental justice theory. In the course of this paper, I argue that one promising avenue for incorporating cultural entitlements into environmental justice theory is the research on place and culture. Second, I identify three sensitizing concepts of place in this literature and propose a three dimensional typology of place. I call these three dimensions – *political place*, *cultural place*, *moral place*. The proposed typology allows us to examine how discourses of place and culture are incorporated in

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narratives of environmental justice. Finally, I apply this typology to an interesting story of environmental and cultural injustice in a community known as Land Between the Rivers in western Kentucky in the United States.

#### LINKING CULTURAL ENTITLEMENTS WITH DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmental justice first emerged in response to the overwhelming focus on the ethic of conservation within American environmentalism. Activists and researchers in environmental justice identify inequities in distribution of environmental goods and bads, though they differ in the elaboration of these inequities. In this section I present a brief overview of the current literature on environmental justice. For analytical coherence, I organize current environmental justice theories as follows: a) Environmental Justice Outcomes; b) Environmental Justice Processes; and c) Environmental Justice Frames.

##### *Environmental Justice Outcomes*

Early studies on environmental justice examined the outcomes of unequal distribution of environmental resources. These studies were primarily policy documents collected by federal agencies to examine environmental and health concerns among poor and minority communities in the United States. Three specific studies commissioned by the government provided startling data on the range and scope of environmental inequality. The earliest report published by the General Accounting Office report in 1983 found that three out of four landfills in the United States are located near predominantly African-American communities. A second report commissioned by the United Church of Christ conducted a multi-state zip code analysis to show that 37.6 percent of landfills are located near predominantly African-American neighborhoods in the United States. Finally, Bob Bullard's research conducted in Houston TX found that 21 of Houston's 25 waste facilities are located in African-American neighborhoods (Bullard 1993). All three studies found that race emerges as a single best predictor of negative environmental outcome. Similar arguments were presented in a range of case studies that followed on the impact of environmental racism and classism on

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Native Americans and Mexican/Chicano-Americans (Berry 1977; Bath, Tanski and Villareal 1994; Comancho 1998; Hooks and Smith 2004). There have also emerged studies on toxic releases (Bowen et al. 1995), occupational exposure (Friedman-Jimenez 1989), waste facility siting (Been 1993), and unequal enforcement (Lavelle and Coyle 1992).

#### *Environmental Justice Processes*

Environmental outcome studies provided substantial data supporting distributive unfairness of environmental goods. Armed with this data, scholars began to study the socio-historical processes and patterns of distribution. For example, Szasz and Meuser (2000) argued that racialized opportunity structures in the United States are primarily responsible for environmental vulnerabilities. Similarly, Pellow (2000) examined the historical and sociopolitical contexts that influence production and distribution of environmental bads. Others investigated the emergence of global capitalism as a leading contributor to unequal distributive patterns (Marbury 1995).

#### *Environmental Justice Frames*

In addition to studies of causes and consequences of environmental distribution, scholars have also examined how communities organized and mounted resistance movements to distributive inequities. Capek (1993) argued that the success of environmental justice frame rests on its ability to link citizen empowerment with the environment. Taylor (2000) proposed that the amazing success of environmental justice movement was primarily due to frame alignment with the civil rights movement discourses which allowed the former to gain legitimacy by building useful linkages between environmental, labor, and minority concerns. Similarly, Epstein (1997) examines the construction of the environmental justice frame as a response to the inattention to the plight of the vulnerable communities and its success in shaping future discourses on race, gender, and the environment.

Environmental justice theories offer a wide range of theoretical and analytical tools for exploring the relation between environmental violations and social inequalities. Yet, the central theme within this broad conceptual rubric is the study of the structure,

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processes, and outcomes of economic distribution. Yet, environmental violations and injustice are not limited to the economic domain. Instead, these occur *in place* and lead to loss of homes, communities, and cultural heritages. Hence, loss or transformation of place and cultural entitlements as a result of environmental violations should be topics for academic studies of justice. Drawing upon research in place and culture, I propose a three-dimensional typology of place to examine how place narratives emerge in the course of environmental justice movements. Each dimension incorporates specific place-based referents used by communities resisting environmental injustices. I define these dimensions below.

*Dimension 1: political place.* This refers to the demarcation of political authority over specific geographic space. Political place can be defined as a real, well-demarcated line that defines the boundaries of a nation, state, or county, though imagined communities exist without specific boundary affiliations (Anderson 1983). Despite the historical genesis of specific political places, once established these are organized and governed by a set of legal, administrative, and jurisdictional authority. Political places are governed through the application of formalized, uniform regulations which often ignore cultural specificities. Thus for example, when demolition of a neighborhood is approved, memories of the birth of one's first child in one's home are not judged as an adequate reason for a reversal of the decision. While most often claims for cultural specificities are resolved through negotiations, uniformities can become too oppressive in the face of deep cultural attachment to one's history. For example, in his historical analysis of the city of Chicago, Cronon (1991) alludes to the formalization of the boundaries of Chicago in the late nineteenth century. As the metropolis transformed itself into a gateway city to the American economy, the regularization of the hinterland contributed to the exploitation and destruction of the cultural specificities of Native American societies along with the flora and fauna of the area.

However, most often demarcation of political places is studied as a question of economic distribution. For example, examining equity in regulatory regimes in political place scholars have examined the distribution of power and privilege with particular

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reference to welfare reform, health and mortality, provisions for community service, and migration (Lobao 2007; McLaughlin, Stokes, Smith and Nonoyama 2007; Saenz, Cready, and Morales 2007; Tickamyer, Tadlock, and Henderson 2007). Yet, equity in regulating places cannot be limited to the legal maneuvers of political place and must include recognition of cultural and moral attachment to places. The two remaining dimensions of my typology explore the role of cultural attachment to place and the role of moral community-based knowledge claims in pursuits of environmental justice.

*Dimension 2: cultural place.* This refers to historical narratives of a community's attachment to place. Cultural/symbolic place references are found in community narratives on memories of place, cultural heritage, and oral traditions. Claims of cultural/symbolic place are expressed through formal and informal narratives of community settlement histories, collective attachment to common cultural norms, and symbolic associations with a particular place. These attributes are explored in Fortmann's (1995) study of indigenous communities in Indonesia whose cultural identities draw upon local folklores and oral histories. For Fortmann, local cultural narratives are social acts that communities engage in as they recreate places and reclaim their identities. References to cultural/symbolic place also include stories of loss and displacement. Maines (1993) conceives of local narratives as social acts necessary for environmental identity construction. Bridger (1996) proposes a political sociology of place that studies the incursion of neo-liberal policies on local communities. Further, scholars have also examined *sense of place* with particular attention to place construction (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), place attachment (Low and Altman 1992; Tuan 1993; Williams and Carr 1993), sense of place and environmental values (Norton and Hannon 1997), and construction of cultural landscapes (Feld and Basso 1996). Place attachments and stories of loss of place in environmental justice movements will find conceptual parallels in these research traditions.

*Dimension 3: moral place.* This refers to an ethic of place. The idea of a place ethic draws closely upon Aldo Leopold land ethic (Janz 2009; Leopold 1949). For Leopold, the land ethic refers to a simple idea: every living being has the right to a home and a habitat that is

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sustainable. This inalienable right, for Leopold, is dependent on the realization that the lives of the humans are dependent on the survival of other species. In other words, Leopold's land ethic challenges the idea of human primacy and attests to the interdependence of all species. For Leopold, the land ethic is essentially an ethic of place that emphasizes the need for better stewardship of our land. The land ethic attests to the importance of sustainability and interdependence of species that are rooted in local and indigenous environmental practices. The idea of the moral place highlights the legitimacy of these indigenous, community-based "non-expert" knowledge systems. This is particularly pertinent in post-disaster rebuilding narratives, where non-expert citizen discourses on place, culture, and histories of environmental preservation are ignored.

I apply this three dimensional typology of place to a narrative of environmental displacement in a rural western Kentucky community called Land Between the Rivers. In particular, I examine how discourses of political place, cultural place, and moral place are adapted as community residents and state agencies negotiated over the role of place, culture, and heritage in Land between the Rivers. I begin with a short narrative about the data collection procedure followed by the case study.

#### METHODOLOGICAL INTERLUDE: RESEARCHING PLACE IN LAND BETWEEN THE RIVERS

I conducted participatory ethnographic research in Land Between the Rivers in western Kentucky over the course of 10 months in 2005. The field research was preceded by short visits, conference meetings and informal discussions with some of the key activists in the area. I first met one of the community residents (a local sociologist) at a national conference and visited the community at his invitation. My key informant introduced me to other members of community and various interested parties in the area. Before finalizing my research plan, I conducted informal discussions with residents to better formulate my research questions and to identify participants for the study. During this period, I established contact with the key state agencies and community members. I attended community meetings and conducted a preliminary focus group with community participants in order to learn about relevant issues regarding people's participation

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in natural resource management. The focus group, comprising of twenty residents acted as a threshold into the community narratives and was useful for conducting a snowball sampling of participants.

Following the focus group meeting, I conducted extensive interviews and documentary/archival research with both state agencies and former residents. In all, twenty two actors were interviewed over a period of one year. I made an effort to include key decision-makers at the U.S. Forest Service, former employees of the Tennessee Valley Authority, other important stakeholders, a cross-section of residents, members of local chapters of the Audubon Society, local environmental groups (Regional Association of Concerned Environmentalists, Heartwood, and Wildwilderness), environmental justice organizations in the Appalachia among others. The interviews with the community residents included representations of members of both gender and in the age group of 40-70 years. Given that most residents identified themselves as White, the sample reflects the current demographics. My respondents were primarily white (of Scotch Irish ethnicity), though there remains a small African-American community.<sup>2</sup> Residents' socio-economic situation ranged from education, finance, tourism, agriculture, and government service. Further, state agency officials for the U.S. Forest Service were also interviewed on multiple occasions. Respondents included both male and female employees working at different levels of administration with direct experience in working with community residents. Further, archival data was gathered using documentary evidence from historical texts, oral history interviews, legal statutes, and policy-briefs.

The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted over a period of 60 minutes with each participant. Follow-up visits were conducted with some of the residents actively engaged in the resistance movement. To ensure systematic and meaningful data gathering an interview guide with representative questions was prepared in advance. Questions addressed participant's family history in the area, what the place meant to them, experiences of displacement, engagement in recent conflicts, how they viewed state policies in Land Between the Rivers, and perceptions of change in the region. All the data was transcribed verbatim, organized and coded in a thematic manner (including pre- and post-displacement narratives of life in the community, displacement stories, community strategies, and

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struggles against commercialization, logging, and protests among others). The coding was useful in re-evaluation of interviews subsequently (Coffey and Atkinson 2006).

## CONFLICTS OVER PLACE: STORIES FROM LAND BETWEEN THE RIVERS

The history of Land Between the Rivers dates back to the late 1770s, when the predominantly Scotch Irish Revolutionary War veterans were granted land as payment for their service in war. The lush green settlement measuring approximately 170,000 acres consists of a 300 mile shoreline and spans Lyon and Trigg counties in Kentucky and Stewart County in Tennessee. Although historical details about early settlements are rare, there is ample evidence of trade relations between the native Chicasaw and Cherokee Indians with French and other European traders as early as 1665. Subsequent settlements started around 1779 and the area was fairly populated by 1835. While farming was the primary occupation of the community, economic developments in the mid-nineteenth century led to the construction of iron furnaces in the region by the Hillman Company.<sup>3</sup> The relative ease of access provided by the two rivers, Cumberland and Tennessee, quickly transformed Land Between the Rivers and its surrounding communities into the nation's leading producer of iron ore.

The transition from agriculture to industry also influenced changing demographics in the region. The rise of investment prospects brought profiteers from the North along with a steady supply of laborers, a large majority of which are African American slaves. In addition to the white furnace workers and African American slaves, Land Between the Rivers also became home to a large group of Chinese migrants employed as "Coolies" in the region. While scanty records are available for these newer migrants, a sole Chinese cemetery still stands on the edges of Land Between the Rivers as a silent marker of the rapidly transforming economic and cultural landscapes of the United States.

The rapid rise of the iron ore industry in the early nineteenth century was followed by a steep decline in the post-civil war era due to several reasons. The recurring fear of a slave insurrection in the region in the winter of 1856-57 seriously affected the continued use of slave

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labor reducing the profitability of the enterprise. Second, charcoal production necessary for fuel supply for the furnaces was intimately tied to the availability of timber in the region. Decreasing supply of timber adversely affected the industry while seriously harming the agricultural pursuits of the settlers (Henry 1975).

The demise of the iron industry was welcomed by local communities who described it as a “godsend” and as an end to an unhealthy dependence upon an extractive business that severely depleted the *Coalins* (Henry 1975:51). The *Coalins* were vast tracts of land maintained under the joint stewardship of the community who shared it for livestock grazing and supplemental hunting (Henry n.d.; Nickell 2007; Wallace 1992). Large tracts of the *Coalins* were transformed during the heyday of the iron ore industry and clashed with the community’s land management practices. In fact, rise and demise of the iron ore industry had little impact on the community’s own economic, environmental and cultural practices. Agriculture and livestock and subsistence farming were always the most important occupations in the area and employed most of the residents. In particular, the settlers were engaged in the production and marketing of tobacco, beef, pork, whiskey, and timber which were produced in abundance and transported nationwide via the rivers (Henry 1975).

Community residents frequently referred to their land as “our place”, or “our farm” and learnt about subsistence agriculture from their previous generations. In fact, the relative isolation of the region allowed the frontier characteristics to linger in the area much longer than in other parts of the country and created a unique culture. A sense of place that emerged from continuous settlements for two hundred years was intimately tied to a shared history, common agricultural practices, principles of environmental stewardship, and collective wellbeing.

Change however came to the region in the 1940s with the initiation of nation building as part of the New Deal. Managed by the Tennessee Valley Authority (hereafter TVA) the construction of the Kentucky Dam on the Tennessee River started in the late 1940s. In the early 1960s Barkley Dam was constructed on the Cumberland River. These two projects permanently flooded the best cropland on the peninsula and involved three rounds of displacements using eminent domain, disrupting social organizations and farming activities

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in Land Between the Rivers. In the early 1960s, TVA decided to remove the remaining families from Land Between the Rivers and the confiscated land was turned into a nature preserve, officially known as Land Between the Lakes (hereafter LBL).

While originally TVA justified its removal decision on grounds of woodlands conservation and protection of water quality, they never used the lakes for water supply. Indeed, for years little use was made of the project, though the forests became a popular recreation area generating sizable revenue for the state. In the mid-1990s TVA however, started planning a major recreational project in the region that included plans for building a theme park, marina, and development of lakefront condos. Outraged by such decisions and sensing a political opportunity in the government agency's implicit recognition that the original dam was unnecessary, the former residents of Land Between the Rivers mounted a vigorous campaign to mobilize support for continued non-commercial use of the land, and for a return of at least some modest access to the region for the original inhabitants. Widespread protests in Land Between the Rivers led to the transfer of administration from TVA to the U.S. Forest Service (hereafter USFS) in 1999. While plans for development and commercialization came to a halt with the transfer, community residents contend that the plans were never formally abandoned and can be witnessed in recent attempts to increase logging in the area. These and similar attempts to control the environmental and cultural narratives were seen as instrumental in challenging the community's tenuous link to their place. In response, the community mounted a resistance movement for cultural and environmental justice. Below, I draw upon the typology of place to explore how discourses of political, cultural and moral place were incorporated by the state agencies and community residents in the course of the conflict. I follow this discussion with a similar application of the three dimensions in studying some of the ongoing negotiations to address community concerns.

#### *Narratives of Place in the Conflict: Applying the Typology*

Demarcation of political boundaries is at the core of the dispute about ownership of cultural heritage between the state and the community in Land Between the Rivers. During the early years of

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dam building, most of the arable land was flooded. TVA used Eminent Domain to create a recreation park with the rest of the land in order to promote tourism and economic development in the region. As a result of the appropriation of the land, the state reorganized the political place by adopting regulatory policies for promoting tourism in the area. The creation of a managed wilderness project effectively led to the loss of political place for the residents of Land Between the Rivers. The ongoing conflict rests on the community's claims for political place, cultural heritage, and moral knowledge.

The conflict over political place emerged early with the naming of the region and the rationale for the appropriation of place. While the recreation area was renamed as Land Between the Lakes, the former residents continue to refer to it simply as Land Between the Rivers. The naming was a local act of resistance to the state's attempt to remake their landscape both physically and socially. Further, the state rationale used to justify the appropriation of political place is heavily contested in Land Between the Rivers. While originally the removal of the community was justified on grounds of woodlands conservation and protection of water quality, the lakes were never put to use for water supply. In fact, the dams were proposed as a most effective tool for flood control in the Ohio valley. Yet, as community residents pointed out it was the decision to build dams on the rivers that flooded some of the best croplands in the country which contradicts the very purpose of the removal.

In recent years, conflicts over community rights to the political place have emerged over management and regulation of community cemeteries. Home to approximately 1000 families for generations, Land Between the Rivers is dotted with family cemeteries and community churches. While most of the churches were demolished by the TVA during the removal of the community, the cemeteries are still managed and maintained by volunteers from the community. The spring cleaning of the cemeteries every year offers the community an opportunity to sustain their connection to the place. While the cemeteries were untouched for decades, the U.S. Forest Service issued a "Cemetery Handbook" in 2001 that identified key strategies for management and care of the cemeteries. The handbook proposed a series of regulations and protocols for accessing

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the keys to the cemeteries for maintenance. The community resisted this directive and argued that U.S. Forest Service must accommodate historical and cultural rights of the community. In its response, U.S. Forest Service argued that the cultural properties located on federal lands are included in the legal jurisdiction of the political place with few exceptions for Native American graves under NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection Act). The case was finally settled to the community satisfaction after a long struggle, but it has led to greater community awareness about the need to seek legal assistance for preservation of cultural place.

In fact, negotiations over cultural place and heritage have been an enduring concern in Land Between the Rivers. A former resident summed up these concerns in his statement to the Congress,

“In Dec. 1967 TVA came to me to buy. I told them I have nothing for them. They told me if I wouldn't take the easy way it would go the hard way. I told them I had gotten nothing easy in my life and we'd just go the hard way. The principles I fought for and my buddies died for such as freedom and the right for a man to make his own way and determine his own destiny are trampled upon and flaunted in my face every day by TVA in this LBL project. Just what is the use in living anyway if everything you have believed in and been taught to admire is desecrated by my own government?” (Mr. Homer Ray, a former resident to the Congress 1968. Source: <http://www.imnothere.org/ConceptZero/lbr.html>).

The physical displacement was also accompanied by loss of cultural artifacts, like the numerous community churches and more generally their cultural place. The second dimension of the typology, cultural place, refers to both tangible and intangible historical and cultural associations of a community to its place. In the case of Land Between the Rivers, pioneer settlers in the area brought their religious traditions as they migrated to the region. Most of the local churches, including Dry Creek and Crockett Creek churches were Baptists and

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were established between 1798 and 1810. Two Catholic churches were also built in the late nineteenth centuries. Other denominations were also represented in the region. The churches acted as shared community locations for interdenominational religious debates, communion, and entertainment. Given the community's strong attachments to these cultural artifacts, TVA's decision to force the residents to move the churches off the land at their own expense was widely viewed as a direct assault on the collective cultural identity of the community. Unable to bear the cost of relocation, residents had to witness the bulldozing of most of the churches by the TVA.

"We were told the churches would be treated as any other structures—we could either remove them or they would be destroyed. Some groups in the area were able to gather enough resources to move their buildings. Most were bulldozed and burned."

Only one Catholic Church, St. Stephens remains intact primarily due to its remote and inaccessible location in the forests. In recent years the community residents were able to salvage and rebuild the St. Stephen's church. It currently acts as an unofficial meeting site for former residents in search for their sense of cultural place. However, the continued management of the church remains a point of contention with the state and the church finds no mention in the official political maps of the region.

Cultural place however is not limited to tangible cultural artifacts. It also refers to contestations over portrayal of cultural heritage by rival groups. Most often, the group that wins the control over political place has the power to construct cultural heritage for legitimizing its political control. In the case of Land Between the Rivers, it was the TVA and later the U.S. Forest Service that was able to adapt cultural images to legitimize its economic development plans. In a moving story narrated by a former resident of Land Between the Rivers, we hear about the misrepresentation of cultural heritage in TVA's Visitors' Center. The narrator discusses his feelings of humiliation and sense of outrage while visiting the Land Between the Lakes Visitors' center as a young boy. To his young mind the display

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that “consisted solely of a moonshine still and a picture of someone sitting in a corncrib husking corn” in front of a dilapidated house (a henhouse, he recounted) was a shocking misrepresentation of his cultural heritage (Nickell 2004). For the TVA it was an effective tool for justifying why the community needed to be protected from their own poverty through economic development and dam building.

A similar story of the importance of cultural imageries in constructing real and imagined cultural places details the construction of a “homeplace” by the U.S. Forest Service. The “homeplace” is a historical recreation of community lifestyles in Land Between the Rivers in the mid-nineteenth century and is a prominent tourist attraction. The LBL official website invites visitors to travel back in time:

Welcome to Pryor Hollow, Stewart County, Tennessee. You're about to enter a rural Tennessee farm "Between the Rivers," *much as it would have appeared* in the mid-19th century. Take a leisurely stroll through our grounds and farm buildings, and visit with our interpreters... (archival source: USFS [n.d]; italics added).<sup>4</sup>

Visitors to the “farm” are treated to a glimpse of farm life in mid-nineteenth century America. Yet, the portrayals represent a generic picture of nineteenth century country life in America with little or no reference to Land Between the Rivers. Community residents were not invited to participate in the conceptualization of the homestead farm while their history went on display. The picturesque farm with its staff dressed in period clothes presents a generic life of a rural community, a touch of culture with little or no reference to cultural heritage. In the state’s rational-legal reconstructions of the political place, the “homeplace” serves as a fleeting nod to culture to provide moral legitimacy to the transformations.

In fact, cultural references are everywhere in state reconstructions of the political place with little acknowledgement of the cultural heritage that grants meaning to these. A lighthouse in one corner of the island beckoning visitors to the marina is easily mistaken for a New England seaside attraction, the elk-bison prairie attempts to

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recreate the *coalins* without incorporating some of the native animals and vegetation, the portraits of community life in the visitor center were never created in consultation with the community whose life it captures for posterity, or the environment education center created for students of nature fails to acknowledge the histories of sustainability in the area exemplified through the Hillman Game Refuge created by the community in the late nineteenth century to encourage sustainable use of common land through communal hay cutting and supplemental hunting.

Non-recognition of heritage is not limited to discourses on cultural place but extends to the role of local knowledge in shaping the community's moral relationship with the environment. *Moral place*, the final dimension of the typology explores how traditional environmental practices and knowledge are instrumental in the community's role as stewards of their land and environment. For the community of Land Between the Rivers, places are formed and maintained by shared knowledge about its flora and fauna. This knowledge, often accumulated over generations and legitimized through community's intimate knowledge of its environment, forms the core of the cultural identity. In a Leopoldian sense, the interdependent relationship between the community and its environment forged through system of positive and negative feedback over centuries has produced a moral knowledge claim over their place and environment. The loss of place seriously jeopardized this informal knowledge system.

In *Sand County Almanac* Aldo Leopold points out that humans should view themselves and the "land" as members of the same community and are obliged to treat the land in an ethical manner. In the Leopoldian sense, the community of Land Between the Rivers viewed themselves as working in tandem with their land and living in close proximity to it. They viewed their long association with their place as unique, intense, and intimate. As a resident reminisced in a community newsletter:

My grandfathers continued to teach my brothers and me about conservation, for we would need to know what he had learned and add to it from our own experiences. He would recite poetry to us,

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often his own. He would tell us the family stories. He would expound on the history of the farm and how we should improve it for our children and grandchildren. We heard it all many times. We were never told, and didn't need to be told, that the farm was our "place." It was the family's--past, present, and future generations. No one ever had to tell us that the farm was not a commodity. That was the assumption that drove what needed to be spoken. The very phrase, "our farm," (or more commonly, "our place") was inclusive.<sup>5</sup>

Earliest expression of these traditional knowledge claims can be found in the depiction of the *Coalins* whose rugged terrain defined the character of the settlements and shaped the relationship between humans and their environment in the peninsula. The *Coalins*, whose closest historical parallel is a traditional commons isolated the community from the steady march of civilization and influenced the pattern of life that emerged in Land Between the Rivers. As a local scholar/activist pointed out,

"It belonged to no one, so it effectively belonged to everyone. It was a remnant piece of the unclaimed world surrounded by communities and farms. It was very early on that turning livestock into the forest of the Coalins to forage during times of pasture shortage became a common practice." (Nickell 2007)

The Coalins remained under the stewardship of all members of the community where communal hay cutting and supplemental hunting provided necessary support to families. It was by no means untouched, but the community's engagement with it was sustainable, shared, managed through an informal land use plan. In fact, the community created the Hillman Game Refuge to initiate aggressive wildlife conservation efforts on their farms to protect the dwindling numbers of wild turkey, white-tailed deer, and other wildlife—and the forest itself (Henry 1975). By 1912, a semi-formal regulatory system

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managed by the community and patrolled by local farmers trained as game wardens, was fully operating in the peninsula to promote sustainable management of the land.

While the nineteenth century industrial developments in the region frequently challenged the community's connections with the Coalins, it was truly tested under the New Deal when competing constructions emerged. TVA's entry into the region under the New Deal set forth a social engineering project that viewed the land use patterns and community management of the Coalins as unsustainable and lacking in clear economic goals. Instead, TVA's goal was to develop the vision plans for economic development that would bring Land Between the Rivers in line with a national model of cultural and economic growth.

The criminalization of the community's land ethic is further demonstrated in the manufacture and certification of environmental knowledge in the Elk Bison Prairie (EBP) and the South Bison Range (SBR), two recreation/education facilities constructed by the U.S. Forest Service to rebuild native pastureland and promote environmental education. The EBP consists of a 700-acre restoration of the "barrens" of Kentucky containing bison, elk and other native wildlife. The SBR, located in the Tennessee portion of LBL, contains 180 acres of cool-season pasture and a herd of American bison. These vast tracts of lands, which originally were to be turned into a commercialized golf course under the TVA administration, have now been restored to pastureland for the wildlife in the region. While the U.S. Forest service presents the pastureland as an environmental stewardship initiative that plans to restore native habitat, the community residents see the conventional pasture management practices adopted in EBP and SBR as inherently unsustainable. Instead they propose adopting more historically accurate practices of conservation, including creation of open pastureland for free range bison and elks (Banerjee 2008). As an anonymous commenter on the LBL Management Plan points out:

reintroduction of these animals would greatly assist in restoration of historic native vegetation conditions. Wildlife viewing and environmental education would be greatly enhanced. LBL would

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be the only site east of the Mississippi with free ranging bison ... As included in the “Original Mission,” environmental education should be a primary focus of activities within LBL. This environmental education should not be based on one's ability to pay for an excursion through an unnatural setting such as caged animals at the Nature Station or the Elk/Bison Range, but rather on helping develop a respect for the land and all of its inhabitants (archival source: USFS 2004b).

In a response to the above suggestion, the Forest Service points out:

The value of the LBL elk herd as the only disease-free, closely-monitored, permissible source herd in North America far exceeds the benefits to allow free-ranging elk and bison at LBL at this time (archival source: USFS 2004a).

Response to the EBP issue in the LBL management plan included numerous appeals contending some of the environmental impacts of the “scientized” management, including soil depletion and other environmental consequences:

Appellants contend the planning documents do not address the environmental consequences of commercial livestock selling operations. The appellants clarify this contention “[t]here is a regular, ongoing commercial livestock selling operation occurring out of the elk and bison herds in LBL ... fields ... are being so overgrazed that they must be fed with significant amounts of baled hay. This has it's [sic] own impacts including bringing in exotics, having the native vegetation grazed and trampled ... and compacting the soil in the enclosures ... yet this isn't addressed at all in the planning documents (USFS 2006a)<sup>6</sup>

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The Forest Service's dismissive response to suggestions for an alternative conservation practice as well as de-commercialization of environmental education underscores the usage of a flawed ethic of scientific "value-based" agriculture that stands in contrast to Leopold's call for creation of a biotic community of nature and humans and sidelines the community's moral narrative about their place and environment.

Place-based discourses are not only liberally incorporated in contestations over heritage, they have also contributed to ongoing negotiations as the state and community residents seek resolutions. Below, I explore how these contesting groups draw upon their cultural toolkit as they search for common grounds in their conflict.

*Narratives of Place in the Negotiations: Applying the Typology*

Recent developments in Land Between the Rivers suggest possibilities for negotiations. While the legal jurisdiction over the political place will remain unchanged, both the state and community actors have made important overtures that hint at possible resolutions. First, community residents are developing a set of metrics for measuring the uniqueness of their culture. Given the conflicts over cultural legitimacy, the community views this as a strategic tool for claiming more representation in decisions about their political place. Referring to this process, one community resident pointed out,

"We realized gradually that the inviolable Promise [of environmental and cultural protection], was really a tenuous, non-contractual agreement at best, and made us ... our heritage vulnerable to interpretation. There is a growing consensus that we need to clearly articulate the cultural significance of our history."

The community adopted two specific strategies to articulate their heritage. First, they organized a volunteer task force to maintain the remote cemeteries, schools, and other artifacts and create documentation of their oral history. This has resulted in the creation of a community newsletter. As one resident pointed out,

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“the shared stories connected us all ... some knew parts of it others did not ... [in the end] we had a narrative of place. As individuals told what they knew of places and events and shared it with the younger members it restored the elders as the sources of cultural knowledge.”

Second, working in concert with the Euchee Indians, the community contacted the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to attain “Traditional Cultural Place” (TCP). This was viewed as a useful strategy for gaining legal right as a cultural consultant in decisions about heritage preservation in Land Between the Rivers. TCP status is also an effective strategy for gaining moral recognition of the community’s historical associations as well as an acknowledgement of their moral and cultural knowledge.

At the state level, there have been some policy changes though the U.S. Forest Service remains ambivalent towards community initiatives in obtaining TCP status. Most significantly, the community was recently granted a consulting party status as part of a heritage protection plan unveiled recently. As part of this new plan, twenty-two cultural protection projects were initiated in 2011.<sup>7</sup> These include restoration of buildings, roads, cemeteries, and initiating an environmental outreach program for promotion of environmental and cultural education. The Heritage Plan is centered around the theme of “Gone but Not Forgotten: All About Discovery”, which states that the objective is to acknowledge that,

“Although the people are gone now, remnants of their lives remain ... visitors can “discover” the history of the area as they enjoy the landscape others once called home. The human history of LBL has left its mark even if it takes some looking (and help) to find it”.<sup>8</sup>

The heritage plan presents an important opportunity to throw limelight on the stories of cultural loss experienced by the community. While the specifics of the community participation still remain unclear, the recent overtures point towards a strategic opportunity for

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negotiation. As a result of these negotiations, the political place may remain unchanged, but an acknowledgement of the moral and cultural place will be important landmarks in the environmental movement in Land Between the Rivers.

#### QUEST FOR *BUEN VIVIR*: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE PURSUIT OF COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

In the mountains of the Andean region, the Aymara community defines their struggles against the forces of globalization as *buen vivir*. The phrase refers to a simple truth: we must learn to live an equitable life, a life that is devoted to the pursuit of *collective well-being*. For the Aymaras, collective well-being is about respect for heritage, diversity of ideas, and strong political consciousness.

Like the Aymara community, the residents of Land Between the Rivers are engaged in the pursuit of an environmental justice that promotes collective well-being. For them, collective well-being does not rest on economic redistribution of environmental goods. Instead, it must acknowledge and embrace the cultural intangibles that are lost in rebuilding – places, homes, churches, networks of friends, and most importantly collective knowledge about history and heritage. The environmental justice movement that emerged as a protest included these intangibles as legitimate claims for injustice. Like the former residents of Land Between the Rivers, scholars must accommodate cultural entitlements as essential for the pursuit of justice. The three dimensional typology builds on current research in place and culture and proposes three concepts of place that emerge in environmental justice conflicts. I apply these three dimensions to a case of study of dam building and displacement and explore how they are incorporated in both contestations and negotiations over place and environment. Below, I examine the lessons that follow from this study and propose two specific contributions.

First, the study helps us problematize the conceptualization of environmental justice framework as a distributive question. Notwithstanding the importance of equity in distribution, claims of cultural entitlements are articulated in the course of environmental justice movements around the world. The story of Land Between the Rivers is a case in point. It narrates the contradictory cultural frames adopted by the community residents and the state agencies as they

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conceptualized environment and culture loss in Land Between the Rivers leading to contestations. As previous studies have concluded, understanding the impact of place attachment provides rare insight into a community's concerns in cases of land loss and displacement. Environmental justice scholars can examine how contestations over cultural loss in post-disaster narratives can exacerbate the pain of displacement and sense of injustice. An exclusive focus on economic distribution may not paint the whole picture.

Second, even when culture and place are included in the environmental justice discourse, they are primarily examined as political places or as conflicts over legal claims to land. The three dimensional typology proposes a multivalent and plural framework that underscores the role of cultural specificities in conflicts over displacement. In particular, moral place and cultural place explore how loss of legal claim to one's land is often accompanied by delegitimation and criminalization of community-based knowledge systems as well as non-recognition of oral histories and symbols. More generally, they postulate that forced removal from one's land is as much an injustice as pollution of one's homes. A pursuit of collective well-being, or *buen vivir*, cannot accept anything less.

As communities displaced by polluting landfills, toxic workplaces, and changing rural economies resist neo-liberal global economic policies, environmental justice movements are gaining further momentum around the world. These movements are increasingly attempting to solve the challenges of economic and cultural inequities as communities grapple with loss of livelihoods and homes, cultures and ways of life. Much like its movement counterparts, environmental justice theory must find a conceptual niche for these economic and cultural concerns. The proposed typology of place offers one strategy for furthering this endeavor.

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### Endnotes

1. <http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/543678?print-article>
2. I did not conduct interviews with the small African American community, who, I was told were not very active in the movement. Community residents suggest aging demographics and migrant African American population as a primary factor for a lack of participation of these groups. A secondary reason could be a more complex relationship with the place given the politics of race in the history of the region.
3. Remnants of these iron furnaces still exist in the area. For more information, see <http://www.explorekentuckylake.com/lbl/iron.html> (retrieved on February 13, 2012)
4. Information about the "homeplace" is available on the Land Between the Lakes official website: <http://www.lbl.org/HPGate.html> (retrieved on April 27, 2011)
5. <http://www.betweenrivers.org/dnickell.html>
6. Appellant contention statement quoted in the appeals decisions published on Feb 23 2006 by the USFS. Appellants include both individual members of the community and a variety of regional environmental associations, including Heartwood, Jackson Purchase Audubon, RACE, Concept Zero, and Coalition of Health Concern.
7. <http://www.lbl.org/pdf/2011HeritageActivitiesReport2.pdf>
8. <http://www.lbl.org/pdf/2011HeritageActivitiesReport2.pdf>

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